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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 000542

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2012

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: ASO REMARK THAT U.S. IRAQ POLICY "NAIVE": REACTION
AND FULL TEXT

REF: A. TOKYO 518

[1](#)B. TOKYO 354

[1](#)C. EMBASSY DAILY ACTIVITY REPORT 01-29-07

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer, reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Public remarks by Foreign Minister Aso on February 3 that the U.S. post-conflict planning in Iraq was "extremely naive" have made headlines here in the wake of more pointed criticism of the U.S. stance on Iraq and troop realignment by Defense Minister Kyuma. Vice FM Yachi said in a meeting with visiting EAP Assistant Secretary Hill and Ambassador Schieffer February 6 that he was sorry for the Minister's remarks but explained that Aso "did not think very deeply" before making them. Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Matoba, an intimate of Prime Minister Abe, stressed to the DCM the same day that there has been "absolutely no change" in Japan's full backing of U.S. efforts in Iraq or on the broader alliance. Aso's remarks on Iraq came in an otherwise laudable speech on why Japan must play a greater role in post-conflict peace-building. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) In a rambling ad-libbed speech to supporters on Japan's role in peace-building February 3, Foreign Minister Aso characterized the U.S. post-conflict approach in Iraq as "extremely naive" (Japanese: "yoochi"), adding it had led the U.S. into "the fix they are (in) now." (Full text of speech in para 11; initially reported ref A). Japanese media have seized on the comments as likely to prompt a stinging reaction from Washington, and a sign that Prime Minister Abe's inability to control his Cabinet Members' verbal slips is causing a widening rift in the U.S.-Japan alliance. Aso's comments come on the heels of public statements by Defense Minister Kyuma that the war with Iraq was "a mistake" and that the U.S. "shouldn't talk so high-handedly" about troop realignment in Okinawa (see refs B and C).

[1](#)3. (U) Commentary in the conservative and pro-alliance Sankei newspaper allowed the possibility that Aso might have been purposely distancing Japan from the U.S. to "head off" a possible U.S. request for Japan to "partially foot the bill for the war on terror." The article knocked down this straw man by quoting Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi as saying Aso had not meant to disparage "the U.S. military's strenuous efforts to stabilize Iraq", and an anonymous aide to Prime Minister Abe as saying the comments were "based on what President Bush said in his speech."

Foot-in-mouth Disease, but No Policy Shift

[1](#)4. (C) In a meeting with Assistant Secretary Hill and

Ambassador Schieffer February 6, Vice-Foreign Minister Yachi apologized to both Hill and Schieffer for Aso's remarks. Yachi said they were not a reflection of Japanese government policy. When Ambassador Schieffer said the remarks had attracted wide attention in Washington, Yachi said that unfortunately Aso "did not think very deeply" on the issue. Yachi clearly was trying to indicate that the remarks were the result of a gaffe rather than a policy change.

15. (C) Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Matoba, a longtime intimate of Prime Minister Abe, assured DCM Donovan at lunch on February 6 that there has been "absolutely no change" in the Japanese government's policy of firm support for the alliance and U.S.-led efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Matoba vigorously defended Aso as an outspoken advocate of the U.S.-Japan alliance as the core of Japanese foreign policy, but noted that at political gatherings, he can sometimes speak "a bit too frankly." (NOTE: He offered no similar defense of Kyuma's comments).

16. (C) Matoba pledged to personally convey U.S. concerns to Kyuma and Aso over their recent remarks "in a Japanese manner." He cautioned, however, against a strong U.S. response, saying that the Japanese press would exploit any perceived differences with Washington to try and undermine the Abe administration. This would be regrettable, as Abe is more focused on strengthening the U.S.-Japan security alliance than any Japanese Prime Minister since his grandfather, Nobosuke Kishi, held the office in the late 1950s, said Matoba.

17. (U) In comments to reporters February 5, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki described Aso's choice of words

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as "inappropriate," but stressed that the Foreign Minister had not meant in any way to suggest the U.S. use of force was in error. Prime Minister Abe encouraged the press the same day to focus not on Aso's verbal slip, but on the overall thrust of the Foreign Minister's speech -- a strong call for Japan to play a greater role in peace-keeping and peacebuilding operations.

The Good Parts

18. (U) Aso's speech, aside from the "naive" comment, showed a willingness to have Japan's defense forces do more internationally. For example, he praised Australia, Finland, and Canada as being "peace-keeping professionals", and suggested they help train Japan's own forces to play a similar role. Japan would take part in peace-keeping operations, he said, "starting with Southeast Asia." The Abe administration plans to fund a joint effort with other countries to train "peace building administrators", he announced, noting that money for the initiative would be included in the government's next fiscal budget starting in April 2007.

Aso Meeting

19. (C) Foreign Minister Aso himself met with Assistant Secretary Chris Hill and Ambassador Schieffer in the

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afternoon of February 6. Aso was careful to read his Six Party talking points from a prepared text. Later he was both affable and voluble but made no reference to his prior critical remarks.

110. (C) COMMENT: While Aso's comments are unfortunate, today's strong reaction by Abe confidantes and GOJ officials does not indicate a shift in Japanese government policy, or a

sign that Aso shares the disagreeable qualities of Defense Minister Kyuma. Whereas Kyuma's criticisms on Iraq and realignment reveal deeply-held personal views that rub against our interests and Japanese government priorities, Aso has a record of placing strong, cooperative ties with the U.S. at the heart of Japanese foreign policy. END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) Begin text of February 3 Foreign Minister Aso speech (Embassy provisional translation):

As we can see in Iraq, when it came to thinking about peace building, somehow when peace came, only talk about fighting ever came out. The reality was that in Iraq the trouble began after the battles were over. Before anyone knew it, Rumsfeld disregarded the opinion of (General Eric Shinseki), the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who is of Japanese ancestry, and easily jumped headlong into battle. As an operation, after the occupation began, the operation from the start was extremely naive and did not go well at all. That's why they're in the fix they are now. That is why it is very important at the time to know what you are doing. So the situation in Iraq today is that the bureaucracy, starting with the Ba'ath Party, has all disappeared, so they now have to talk of building a bureaucracy from scratch.

If you think about the situation, the potential that Japan holds is fairly large. We must by all means use that potential. When we think about what we can do, the example that now comes to mind is Cambodia. In the past, the group known as the Khmer Rouge was notoriously bad, but they were brought to trial. Japan helped bring about the trials. Cambodia's civil law, civil suit system -- all came about because Japanese and Cambodians got together and drafted a civil lawsuit system and a civil law. All of that was made a reality because Japanese Ministry of Justice Officials and judicial officers went over there to help. Those people drafted Cambodia's legal code.

In addition, although we Japanese often talk about local government law, when it comes to such law, people in Eastern Europe or Arabian countries have zero understanding, so you have to start from scratch in talking about local government law. In dealing with people that do not even know the meaning of local autonomy, if you start talking about local administration and local taxes, you completely lose them. You have to start from scratch in explaining the difference between local and central government taxes and or even that they are different. In order for those people to understand

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such matters, we bring over (for example) from Vietnam about 10 persons a year to study at the local government university that is operated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, where they are properly taught local administration. When those people return to their country, they can talk about what local autonomy is in their own Vietnamese language. What we did in the Meiji Period, we can now teach to others. The lessons that Japan has learned, we now at least can pass them on. Though it costs money and is really difficult to teach, still, let us teach it well.

There are pros at going to battle, but there are also pros at peace-keeping operations (PKO). For example, Finland, Canada, and Australia have PKO professionals. Call them over and have them teach us. In addition, there is the so-called local autonomy. Such administration also is peace building, and administrators cannot avoid it. It is absolutely essential. So let us figure out how to train such administrators and let us put up the money for such training. That is something we Japanese cannot teach all by ourselves. Foreigners should jump in and help. Starting with Southeast Asia, we will engage in such PKO. Those we will train will include private sector persons. Japan will bear the cost. There is tremendous expectation of us from the United Nations. The things that Japan is really skillful in doing are known all over the world. To cover the cost of such

training, we will put money in next year's fiscal budget for what I have just mentioned. Japan is now much more highly appreciated in many ways more than you can imagine. I think it is essential that we consider this approach in the future.

End text.
SCHIEFFER